

Message Text

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47 41

ACTION AID-59

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FM AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

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DEPT PASS SECDEF NIACT IMMEDIATE JCS NIACT IMMEDIATE USCINCSO NIACT
IMMEDIATE

ROUTINE SAN JOSE SAN SALVADOR MANAGUA TEGUCIGALPA MEXICO USUN
USMISSION GENEVA

AID/AIDAC/PHA/FDRC

E.O. 11652 NA

TAGS: SWEL, GT

SUBJ: GUATEMALAN EARTHQUAKE - GUATEMALA SEISMIC ACTIVITY

1. THE MISSION WAS BRIEFED THIS EVENING BY GEORGE
PLAFKER, RESEARCH GEOLOGIST, USGS, MENLO PARK. THE INFORMATION
SUPPLIED BY MR. PLAFKER WILL BE USEFUL TO ADMINISTRATOR
PARKER IN HIS UPCOMING CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY.

2. MR. PLAFKER BELIEVES THAT BECAUSE OF THE EARTHQUAKE THERE
WILL PROBABLY BE A GOOD DEAL OF DAMAGE CAUSED BY FLOODING.
THE QUAKE HAS CAUSED NATURAL DAMS TO FORM IN SEVERAL AREAS,
PARTICULARLY TWO KILOMETERS SOUTH WEST OF SAN MARTIN. THE
APPROXIMATE COORDINATES OF AN EARTHQUAKE FORMED DAM SIXTY
METERS IN HEIGHT ARE 90 DEGREES 48.6 MINUTES, 14 DEGREES 46.1
MINUTES. HOPEFULLY, U-2 PHOTOS WILL BE ABLE TO LOCATE THIS DAM.
THE ARMY ENGINEERING SURVEY TEAM HAS SURVEYED THIS DAM WHICH
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HAS FILLED A "V" SHAPED VALEY. IT WILL BE VERY DIFFICULT TO

BLAST THIS DAM OPEN, AS AFTER A BLAST, POWDER TYPE EARTH FROM THE SLOPES WOULD FALL BACK IN THE BLASTED AREA. AS TO DIGGING THE DAM OUT, WE WOULD FACE THE SAME PROBLEM WITH EARTH FALLING INTO THE EXCAVATED AREA. THE DAM HAS ALREADY STARTED TO FILL WITH WATER. SHOULD THE DAM BURST, THE BRIDGE TO SAN MARTIN WOULD MOST PROBABLY BE DESTROYED, AS WOULD ONE OF TWO SMALL HYDRO-ELECTRIC POWER STATIONS DOWNSTREAM. WE HAVE REQUESTED USCGS AND THE CORPS OF ENGINEERS TO EXPLORE WAYS TO MITIGATE SUCH DESTRUCTION. OBVIOUSLY, WE MUST TAKE STEPS TO PROTECT PEOPLE WHO MIGHT BE IN THE PATH OF ANTICIPATED FLOODING.

3. THE SLIDING CAUSED BY THE EARTHQUAKE WILL ALSO RESULT IN MUCH DEBRIS BEING CARRIED BY SWOLLEN RIVERS. IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT THE MORE SILTAGE IN A WATERWAY, THE MORE LIKELY IT IS THAT THE WATER WAY WILL BE ABLE TO CARRY BOULDERS AND LARGE OBJECTS. THIS OBVIOUSLY HAS IMPLICATIONS FOR OUR PLANS TO HELP IN THE RECONSTRUCTION OF EARTHQUAKE DAMAGED BRIDGES.

4. AS TO THE INTENSITY OF THE EARTHQUAKE ITSELF, WE LEARNED THE FOLLOWING:

A. IT IS UNLIKELY THAT ANOTHER QUAKE OF MAJOR INTENSITY WILL OCCUR AGAIN SOON ALONG THE MOTAGUA FAULT LINE. THIS LINE HAS SO FAR BEEN TRACED FOR ABOUT 145 MILES FROM MORALES IN THE EAST TO MIXCO VIEJO IN THE WEST. IT UNDOUBTEDLY CONTINUES FARTHER WEST BUT VERY ROUGH TERRAIN HAS PREVENTED ITS BEING TRACED. (INCIDENTALLY THE VERY IMPRESSIVE RUINS AT MIXCO VIEJO WERE DAMAGED BY THE QUAKE).

B. THERE ARE A SERIES OF SMALLER FAULTS IN THE WESTERN PART OF GUATEMALA CITY; THESE FAULTS WILL COMPLICATE BUILDING, SOME OF THE FAULTS RUN THROUGH ALREADY CONSTRUCTED BUILDINGS.

C. THAT IT MAY BE AS LONG AS THREE MONTHS BEFORE THERE ARE NO LONGER ANY TREMOURS (TODAY IN STAFF MEETINGS WE FELT THREE NOTABLE TREMOURS).

5. WE SUGGEST THAT WASHINGTON CONSULT WITH THE USGS TO GATHER THEIR ADVICE ON PROTECTIVE MEASURES WHICH MIGHT BE TAKEN IN THE EVENT OF SEVERE FLOODING.

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6. DUE TO THE DELICATE ENGINEERING INVOLVING IN RELEASING DAMMED UP WATERS, IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THE PERUVIANS, WORKING THROUGH THE OAS, MIGHT BE OF GREAT ASSISTANCE TO THE GUATEMALANS. IT IS CRITICAL TO NOTE THAT THE LONGER TIME PASSES THE MORE DIFFICULT IT WILL BE TO RELEASE DAMMED UP WATERS; IT IS FRIGHTENING TO CONTEMPLATE WHAT HEAVY RAINS COULD BRING.

MELOY

NOTE BY OC/T: GUATEMALA 1231 PASSED ABOVE ADDRESSEES.

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